KNOW THYSELF: SELF-REVELATION IN *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*

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E.M. Forster's novel *A Room with a View*, published in 1908, narrates the story of a young upper middle class woman, Lucy Honeychurch who spends some time in Italy with her older cousin, Charlotte and learns a few things about life and music. This novel brings together a few English characters and Italians to interact, to exchange their respective cultures and to play out one of the favourite themes of Forster – cross-cultural understanding.

Lucy's visit to Italy brings her in close contact with George Emerson who surprises her with an impulsive kiss. Though Lucy in her typical English upper middle class judgment considers George to be rash, eventually gets attracted to him. The first half of the novel is set in Italy and in the second half, Lucy returns home in Surrey. This shift in setting, gives Forster an opportunity to examine the behaviour of his protagonist in two different societies. Lucy, who comes to terms with her natural self in Italy, is more stiff and circumspect in Surrey. Her contact with George helps her to realize her own natural self. This encounter also helps Lucy to discard Cecil, her proposed match. In the process, Lucy learns that Cecil who represents the English upper class likes to control people and that he is more appreciative of materials rather than people. In contrast to Cecil, she finds George, loving and she eventually marries George. The novel ends with Lucy and George back in Italy, staying in 'a room with a view,' of pleasant nature.

This novel is about many regular themes of Forster including nature versus man, self-revelation, love, identity, sexuality, gender roles, masculinity and cross-cultural understanding. It also deals with Forster's moralistic vision of society in which he intertwines the theme of self-revelation of his protagonist by arranging characters that present medieval typology juxtaposing with that of the purity of Italian renaissance. For instance, Elizabeth Langland argues, "while Forster's works are important documents of the transition into modernism," their "strong ethical grounding and a commitment to illuminating human life in society" still tie them more to nineteenth-century conventions." (Web)

Forster in his *A Room with a View* tries to show how this religious dogma works upon the character, leading them to falls conceiving of their own selves. The advent of industrialization and materialism in the Edwardian society brought the evils of material prosperity in which the character run behind the mirage of falls identity.

Forster, in the novel, configures the theme self-revelation. The female protagonist, Lucy Honey church who represents the Edwardian materialistic English society, is moved much away from her real self in the chaos of modern mundane life. Similarly, the room in which she lives as a tenant signifies her temporal stance in the society. This stay indicates, yet again, the fixities of socio-cultural and religious package that she has. These fixities are so misleading that they take her away from her real self. Certainly, the cosmos around her creates a false self which has no tinge of pure passion. The beliefs and ideas that Lucy holds are from the workers' paradise-the Edwardian workaholic society.

For instance, Mr. Beebe, the newly-appointed local rector for Lucy's township finds glimpses of a deep self or true self in Lucy when she plays Beethoven on the piano in Italy and tells her: "If Miss honey church ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting--both for us and for her." (30 Mr. Beebe draws two drawings, one of Lucy as a kite held down by her traveling chaperon and elderly spinster cousin, Charlotte Bartlett; the other of the kite (Lucy) set free. For Mr. Beebe, Lucy's true self can be found only in complete freedom from the reins of others. For him, this means celibacy. Both fine arts—music and painting- helps in projecting Lucy with an elevated self. Lucy, in this way, gets to know that she has a true self which is celestial and divine. Conversely, when Mr. Emerson begs Lucy in Santa Croce early in the novel to forge a friendship with his son, George, he feels, both will find something of their true selves:

> *You are inclined to get muddled, if I may judge from last night. Let yourself go. Pull out from the depths those thoughts that you do not understand, and spread them out in the sunlight and know the meaning of them. By understanding George you may learn to understand yourself. It will be good for both of you. (26).*

It is Mr. Emerson's idea of freedom and selfhood found in union with another, rather than Mr. Beebe's seemingly-religious solitude. It also throws light upon bringing George and Lucy together who represents the true selves with pure passions. George, a soul with pure passion can help Lucy to come out from her ambiguous, absurd and artificial notion of self and to discover her true self in the course of love and union with George.

It is Mr. Emerson, who exchanges his room which has a scenic beautiful view with that of Lucy. Lucy's room, which does not have a view metaphorically, indicates her hidden self, which lacks an insight to look at the world from a positive and broader perspective. The exchange of rooms, in other words, is an exchange of cultures and outlooks. Further, it can be stated that Mr. Emerson's room with a view gives Lucy a view to see the world from her changed perspective and changed the self. It is the room with a view which works as a prism in amplifying and elevating the true self of Lucy. This act of exchange of rooms also signifies the shifting of artificial to passionate world.

For most of the incidents in the novel, Lucy runs from the true, deep self that the novelist constantly hints exists in her. It is running away from the true self due to the societal and cultural nuances. The title of the last chapter begins with the word "Lying" which exemplifies how much Lucy hides from herself. In one of these chapters, the narrator describes Lucy this way:

> *She gave up trying to understand herself, and joined the armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain, and march to their destiny by catchwords. The armies are full of pleasant and pious folk….Their pleasantry and piety show cracks, their wit becomes cynicism, their unselfishness hypocrisy; they feel and produce discomfort wherever they go. Lucy entered this army when she pretended to George that she did not love him, and pretended to Cecil that she loved no one. (169-170)*

The conversion of Lucy helps her to come out with a renewed self-a self who has a new sense of spiritual realities and truth. It also gives her insight of a new morality, beyond any discrimination like class, gender and nationality. Edwardian era was sandwiched between the Victorian notion of romanticism and Puritanism. It never accepted fully the Renaissance, nor could it stick up with the Puritan notion of morality. Forster presents both the ideologies

by placing his characters in England and Italy. These two nations present the notions of Puritanism and Romanticism respectively. For instance, Lucy, through her actions projects the strong pull of Puritan philosophy and an upsurge of Italian notion of Romanticism.

The novel presents binaries by associating Italy with the Renaissance and England with the Middle Ages. While on her tour in Italy with her cousin, Charlotte Lucy begins to gain some insight into her true self, in the first part of the novel. This vacation is cut short in order to avoid a scandal over Lucy's kiss with the young George Emerson. In the second half of the novel, as she returns to England, she becomes engaged to Cecil Vyse.

The first part of the novel Lucy's kiss with George is a knocking by true passion on the artificial self of Lucy, which she does not like, and hence, rushes back to her Puritan ideology-England. The artificial self is afraid of freedom, liberty and truthfulness that gush forth through George. The false self of Lucy pushes her to medieval values of morality. Forster makes it clear to his readers that Lucy's coming back to England is her regression from her true self. Even through the titles of chapters the writer hints the spiritual status and modes of the protagonist. The title of the chapter "Medieval," shows that she is regressing into her false self. Even the last chapter of the novel is titled "The End of the Middle Ages," predicts a shift in Lucy's character-mobility from her false self to true self.

Lucy's movement from the Middle Ages to the renaissance and from England to Italy involves a movement from a false orthodox self towards a true and elevated self. The English characters have always the notion of morality and false self due to strong impact of Puritanism on the one hand and materialism on the other hand. For instance, Cecil Vyse, Charlotte and Lucy represent the Puritan materialistic ideas of Edwardian English society. As a result, they regress towards medievalism. On the contrary, George Emerson, Mr. Emerson, Miss. Lavish and Mr. Beebe exemplify the renaissance ideology of true self without any hypocrisy or pomp.

In evaluating and interpreting each other, the British characters rely on multiple typing systems such as social class, nationality, gender, political party, religion. For instance, when Mr. Emerson offers to give Lucy and Charlotte his rooms that have a view, Charlotte can tell that he is "ill-bred, even before she glanced at him."(4) Hence, Charlotte fails to understand the true identity of Mr. Emerson as she does not care to throw away false self, and

is very comfortable in her cocooned false self. Her prejudiced approach indicates the age old impact of Puritanism, as she cuts this remark without even looking at him. She stands for the Edwardian English society which has a wrong preconceived notion about renaissance and Italy as the spirit of freedom is associated to vulgarity. She rejects the room which shows her prejudice against the Italian culture as well as George. But after the clergyman's interruption she accepts the room with a view that symbolizes her realization of holiness. Laxmi Prakash states in this context that:

> *Lucy's initial rejection of Emerson's room 'with a view' is the first stage of her non-acceptance of George's love—George the symbolic embodiment of naturalism—and her eventful acceptance of 'the room with a view is in tune with her recognition of 'the holiness of direct desire.' (147)*

Miss Lavish, as Forster projects her, is an Italian novelist who holds doubly elevated true self, as she is an Italian by birth and a sensible artist. Her Italian origin of freedom and liberty and the wider spectrum of life in its all nakedness make Miss. Lavish, a herald to guide Lucy to perceive life without any hide. She instructs Lucy, "The true Italy is only to be found by patient observation."(34) According to her, passive observation of passionate Italian life makes hardly any change in the observer. Though represents a false self does not remain passive in Italy as she is involved in exchanging kisses with George. This active anticipation of Lucy in Italy shakes off the ashes accumulated on herself. But at the same time, her Puritan, materialistic and medieval self does not accept the change. In a fear of sudden change, she regresses to England. This pendulum movement of Lucy indicates her sojourn from medievalism, which represents false self to libertine, free spirit-renaissance of Italy, representing true self, and reversal of it. In this act, Lucy experiences temporal Bohemianism through her adventure of kissing George. It also gives her a glimpse of free spirit and true self. The vehemence of it threatens her false self, and, she is pushed back to England.

The numbers of incidents take place in the novel are deliberately arranged by Forster to show the dichotomy in the approaches between the British and Italian. For instance, Mr. Emerson asks "Is he nice? Is he deplorable or just disagreeable? Is he a Socialist?" (8) This inquiry by the British characters shows their concern about the social identity of Mr. Emerson rather than greeting him as pure human being. This inquiry also

depicts the politicized lingual markers of Edwardian society. The elderly Miss Alans believes that Mr. Emerson lacks delicacy. This indicates that the English evaluate Mr. Emerson from the parameters of Puritan snobbish falsehood. The act of non-acceptance of Mr. Emerson by the British at the pension indicates that they do not have a capacity to understand him, and ultimately his free spirit and true self. He seems to resist typological interpretation as he alone "speaks the truth"(8) being an Italian. Lynne Walhout Hinojosa reasserts the idea of how the British characters in the novel are superficial and cosmetic in their evaluation of others. He says:

> *Most of the British characters fail to see the true selves of other people. They may perceive vague hints, but they lean to make swift character judgments and value rankings based on surface codes of behavior, appearance and language. In this novel, character typology is of the "false self," a hermeneutics of the surface. The "true self" is something deeper, more essential, than any typology can capture. Such a view inverts the Puritan metaphysics of character typology, which was thought to illuminate the true self's deep moral state. (Web)*

Such typecasting and value judgments are typical of Edwardian society, wherein characters and their behaviors are governed by the moral codes of Puritans. Material prosperity and advents of market commoditizes the behavioral pattern of the characters. Hence, patronized behavior, which projects the false self and hides the true self becomes the cannon of British society unlike the Italian. For instance, Cecil Vyse aptly represents the typological British with false self:

> *Like a Gothic statue. Tall and refined ... he resembled those fastidious saints who guard the portals of a French cathedral. Well educated, well endowed, and not deficient physically, he remained in the grip of a certain devil whom the modern world knows as self-consciousness, and whom the medieval, with dimmer vision, worshipped as asceticism. A Gothic statue implies celibacy, just as a Greek statue implies fruition. (85)*

Cecil represents medievalism as he assigns himself to the typology of Edwardian society. All his efforts are seen in trying himself to be defined as a perfect human being. He

proclaims himself to be an aesthete that again places him in the array of British people with false self.

The Puritan typological dictates that frame the self of people into false self. Further, this false self leads the character to make impractical judgments, for instance, Cecil constantly makes negative judgments and rude comments about others, judging them by their types of gatherings like furniture, music or hobbies, or by how they pronounce the names of Italian painters. This indicates that identity of human being is judged upon material prosperity unlike the Italian spiritual identity. Cecil, for instance, tries "to affect a cosmopolitan naughtiness which he was far from possessing." Cecil constantly fashions himself, but he is of the surface only, and he completely lacks the inner freedom and physicality of the renaissance type he strives to be. Instead of embodying new renaissance values, he utterly fails to live a life of the body. His failed attempt to kiss Lucy passionately in the woods is an amusing frustration. Lucy admits that she always thinks of Cecil in a room rather than outdoors. Instead of tapping his "true self," Cecil self-consciously tries to create himself to be a certain type, and this is medieval and ascetic. George, in this way, presents freedom romance, liberty, passion and truthfulness whereas; his foil represents a fenced self and classicism.

Cecil's uncharitable interpretations of others are found common. Even he fails to read Lucy's deep self. He thinks of her as a "woman of Leonardo da Vinci's, whom we love not so much for her as for the things that she will not tell us" (87). Lucy takes on light and shadow, shades of beauty (one chapter is titled "Lucy as a Work of Art"), but Cecil never infiltrates her inner reality, and the narrator leads the reader to detect this conflict right away. The only relationship Cecil enacts with Lucy and with other people is "feudal: that of protected and protector."(149)

Charlotte Bartlett, Lucy's cousin is also attached to the medieval ideology. She articulates the worldview of provincial society about the secondary status of second sex. She advocates the Puritan codes about women and tries to fit into these codes. As she explains to Lucy:

> *It was not that ladies were inferior to men; it was that they were different. Their mission was to inspire others to achievement rather than to achieve themselves. Indirectly, by means of tact and a spotless name, a lady could*

accomplish much. But if she rushed into the fray herself she would be first censured, then despised, and finally ignored. Poems had been written to illustrate this point. (39)

Charlotte represents the medieval woman of false self who is anxious about boiling the moral and social scandal that potentially could proceed about Lucy and George. Through Lucy's interactions with the medieval Charlotte and Cecil, the novel specifically links to feminism. The boundaries placed on women are the immoral "fencing in" of human life that Forster sees resulting from Puritan-like character typology.

Mr. Emerson rejects the philosophy of life conveyed by Mr. Eager, the British rector in Florence, who represents the religious authority. Mr. Eager fails to understand the deep self of Emerson. Realizing this, Lucy returns to the Emersons. A "renaissance" in Mr. Emerson's terms involves a return to the body, a simple being or presence in the world outside of any typological interpretation, and the fullest living of the body in a life of love among other humans. For him, each human should be equally capable of living this way in freedom.

For Mr. Emerson, the true self can only be experienced if the body is free. When the Italian cab driver brings his girlfriend along on the excursion to Fiesole, Mr. Eager disapproves, but Mr. Emerson defends them by saying:

"Do we find happiness so often that we should turn it off" the box when it happens to sit there? To be driven by lovers--A king might envy us, and if we part them it's more like sacrilege than anything I know....We have no rights over his soul." (61-62)

Though Mr. Emerson sounds antichristian, he looks at women as equals to men. In this argument he reverses the fundamental doctrine of the holy Bible. He tells Mr. Beebe:

"The Garden of Eden ... which you place in the past, is really yet to come. We shall enter it when we no longer despise our bodies.... In this--not in other things--we men are ahead. We despise the body less than women do. But not until we are comrades shall we enter the garden." (122-23)

Here, Mr. Emerson advocates equality of men with women. The room with a view of the Emerson's clearly signifies their open view towards the world. It is their elevated self- forces them to interact with other character that nourishes false self-enveloped by Puritan mentality Garden of Eden with free spirit of love and liberty. The characters George, Mr. Emerson, Miss. Lavish and Mr. Beebe are both pioneers and followers of renaissance period with true self. The novel ends with the engagement of Cecil and Lucy which goes for a toss and Lucy finds herself with George, with her true self uniting another true self. In other words, it is a marriage of true minds, with George and Lucy in Italy—Adam and Eve in Eden Garden. Thus, Lucy rejects Cecil and goes with George which embodies the journey of Self-realization. Regarding Lucy's passage towards true self, Laxmi Prakash exemplifies:

> *Lucy does not remain for long, in the darkness of unreality and untruth. Her self-questioning continues and finally culminates in her breaking off the engagement with Cecil. Charlotte too, fails to recruit Lucy 'to the army of the benighted.' But Lucy's rejection of Cecil Vyse is only first stage of her symbolic journey towards self-realization, truth and light. (155)*

George and Lucy, in their union believe in the true self and not in artificial, false self. They deny the Puritan typography and Testament, where human behavior is always patternised by church or the so-called moral codes. The protagonist, frees herself from the yoke of medieval Puritan mentality of false self and emerges as a free soul breathing freely in Italy. Lucy's sojourn to Florence is her return to a room with a view. It is a reunion of the true self with soul, where she discards her cosmetic self. To reassert this view Laxmi Prakash writes:

> *The following spring Lucy returns to her room with a view in Florence with George her husband. She has acknowledged the truth of her life—her youth, her love and the value of reality and light which frightened her earlier. (155)*

Thus, Forster tries to unfold the true self of the Edwardian people through his characters and presents the different attitudes towards life.

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